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## **Chapter 16**

### **The Child in Community: Constraints From the Early Childhood Lore\***

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#### **ANOTHER WAY OF SEEING THE CHILD?**

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As a teacher, I have learned repeatedly that my understanding of young children is limited by my own experience and knowledge, and that I need to always be open to new truths, new perspectives on children's capabilities, and most of all, new protagonists or people who stimulate change. The preprimary educators in Reggio Emilia have been, of late, important protagonists for me in terms of changing the possibilities I see for young children to be active and contributing members of communities. In this chapter I show the limiting power of preconceptions about young children's potential for community participation, and examine some constraints that exist in my own culturally based set of rules and expectations about what young children are able to do.

The Reggio Emilia early childhood educators speak over and over of their belief that the environments and curriculum of a school begin with an image of the child. What are our expectations of the young child? How does the child learn and develop? Where does the child's identity come from? What are the child's goals, needs, desires, and rights? The answers we hold (often unconsciously) are a reflection of our values, our aspirations for the next generation, our beliefs about child development, and more generally, our cultural perspective. This image becomes a lens through which we view and interpret the child and decide how we will respond as teachers and parents.

What is regarded as best practice among early childhood professionals in the United States is also based on an image of the child. Although educators' views are diverse and constantly changing over time, there is at any point in time a predominant view, reflected in the leading textbooks and the publications of the major professional organizations, which I refer to as

"The Early Childhood if Lore." A close look shows how deeply this common professional perspective (reflected recently, for example, in the body of principles called "Developmentally Appropriate Practice;" Bredekamp, 1987) is grounded in Anglo-American cultural meaning systems, in which self-reliance, self-actualization, and the pursuit of personal freedom and equality are highly valued (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985; Bowman & Stott, 1994; Stewart & Bennett, 1991; Williams, 1994). The lens of individualism has led the profession to focus on how young children attain autonomy, individualism, and uniqueness in their learning, development, and interpersonal relations.

To intensify matters, there is a frequent perception among early childhood educators that young children are primarily "egocentric," focused on the self and limited in ability to relate to and care about the concerns of others (Goffin, 1987; Hill & Reed, 1990). Although this focus on the individual and concern for the developmental limitations of young children have helped shape many innovative approaches to early education, they have also allowed many in the profession to set aside or downplay much accumulated knowledge and research about very young children's prosocial, intersubjective, and empathic capacities, and to reject as "developmentally inappropriate" the contrasting cultural assumptions and wisdom valuing "interdependence" as opposed to "independence," stemming principally from communities of color in North America (Mallory & New, 1994; Williams, 1994).

By validating a particular view of the potential of young children, the early childhood profession has fostered a discontinuity between preschool programs and the goals of many families and their communities (Phillips, 1994). One strategy for ensuring the success of all children in a pluralistic society would be to stretch the vision of childhood that guides its social institutions.

## THE IMAGE OF THE CHILD AS A SOCIAL ACTOR

Tiziana Filippini, *pedagogista* in Reggio Emilia, offers in Chapter 6 (this volume) an image that affirms the child's role as a "protagonist of his or her own growth" but also emphasizes children's yearning *from* the very earliest years for relationships and the need to negotiate "with everything the culture brings them."

The idea of schools as a system of relationships in Reggio Emilia is captured a phrase that is used in the Emilia Romagna region of Italy and is reflective of its socialist traditions: *Io chi siamo* (Rankin, Chapter 12, this volume). Like so, many of the terms used by these teachers, this phrase can only be roughly translated into English because it hints at an unfamiliar cultural concept *la chi siamo*, "I am who we are," refers to the possibility of reaching beyond the individual through mutual exchange with others.

This shared conception of education can be characterized as a true community, a place where collaboration, caring, and conflict between adults and children go hand in hand. This sense of community becomes the envelope around the important interactions that occur within each classroom and school. In Reggio Emilia, the assumption is that children from their very beginnings are active contributors to the life of a community.

By community, I am not referring to the pseudocommunities that some politicians love to talk about nor is community simply the physical proximity that occurs for every group. *Gatto* (1992) offered a description of what I mean by community:

A community is a place in which people face each other over time in all their human variety, good parts, bad parts, and all the rest. Such places promote the highest quality of life possible, lives *of* engagement and participation. (p. 56)

### SOME CONSTRAINTS ON COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

The experience of Reggio Emilia offers us a way to make changes in our own teacher lore concerning the child's role in community, because it challenges images of the child prevalent in many early education settings. These images not only guide, but also *constrain*, views of what is possible with young children. I discuss six constraints, concerning the following issues: *ownership, conflict, emotions, identity, public life, and history*. Each constraint works against young children's active participation in a caring and truly dynamic learning community. The central ideas that I propose, drawn from teacher interviews and classroom observation in the United States and Italy, will be examined more fully in a forthcoming , book by Carolyn Edwards, Lella Gandini, and myself (in preparation).

The ideas to be discussed have for me grown out of these interviews and observations, but it is important to recognize that already in North America there exist many programs likewise challenging the predominant preconceptions about child development (Hale, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Williams & Gaetano, 1985). My hope is that this analysis will provide a further occasion to challenge prevailing assumptions, and also for many readers, a recognition that their culturally based views of childhood-treated by the mainstream profession as marginal to The Early Childhood Lore-are indeed worthy of great respect and required for a new professional view of young children's capacity to contribute to community.

#### **Constraint 1: Do We Create Boundaries Around Children's Work and Ideas by Designating Individual Ownership?**

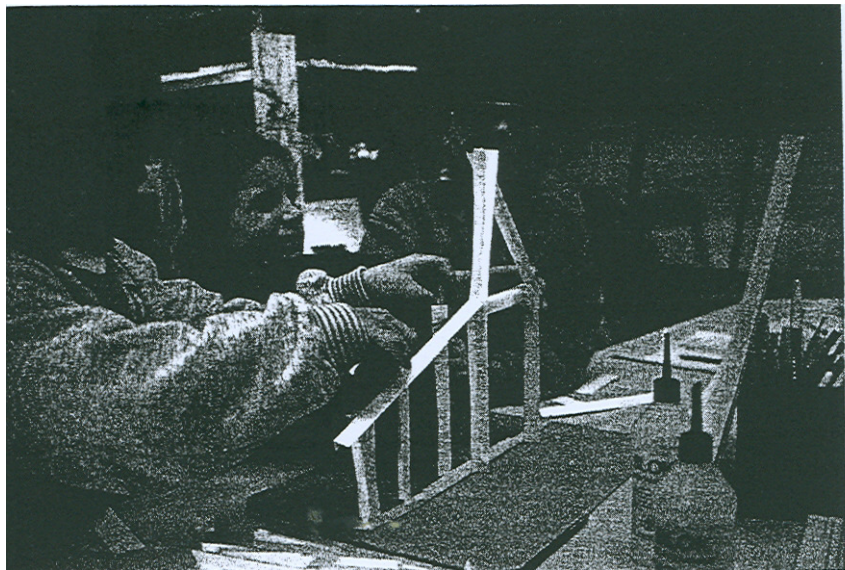
The individualistic lens of Anglo-American culture, as reflected in early childhood teaching, is evident in adults' active protection of the individual child's ownership of her or his work. This is particularly the case when it concerns children's artistic work. With the exception of some group creations such as collages or murals, artwork is seen as strictly "belonging" to the individual who created it.

Here is an example from my dissertation observations in the United States: (Nimmo, 1992). A 4-year-old boy is happily constructing a wooden car under the guidance of his teacher. The teacher, having noted that the preschooler has his own ideas about where the wheels should go, pulls back from insisting on her procedure for completing the car. Nearby, a slightly older, more skilled peer looks on, awaiting his turn at the activity. Full of ideas and a desire to participate, unable to hold back any longer, he moves to hammer a wheel on the side of the car and thereby initiate a possible solution. At this point, the teacher intervenes, telling the older boy he must ask if this is all right with the builder of the car. Later the teacher explained her intervention as a matter of ownership:

Because it was Jacob's car and we try to communicate to the kids that they need to be respectful of other kid's property and..., it was Jacob's car and so Jacob could control what happened to it. (Nimmo, 1992, p, 139)

We also showed the video clip of this event to a large group of educators in Reggio Emilia. Whereas some teachers from Reggio recognized the teacher's desire to protect the child's project and that this action was a mark of "respect" for the child, others seemed uneasy with the teacher's intervention. One teacher from the Diana School offered this advice to the teacher: "Have more confidence in the resources of the children to help each other" (Nimmo, 1992, p. 139).

Certainly, the teachers in Reggio Emilia recognize the need of individual children to pursue ideas without interruption, and children do complete many pieces of work that will bear their name alone. Children's work is collected and archived over the course of their entire 3 years at the center. Then they each take home a huge bag of their creations-a virtual history of their time at the center - at the graduation celebration. What is different here is that the focus or value is not on ownership, but rather on the sharing of perspectives.



**FIGURE 16.1. Children planning and working together on a paper construction of city, La. Villetta School.**

On a visit to the preschools in Reggio Emilia, one can commonly observe one child commenting on, or even working on, another child's drawing, painting or other representation. This kind of movement across the boundaries (at least those created in my mind) between one child's work and another's, was striking to me and not familiar in my experience, but it was clearly woven into the fabric of these schools.

Consider this event I observed at the Diana School. A young child is at work at an easel drawing the image of a flower she sees in a vase nearby. A peer watches her intently for some time, and then reaches forward, takes another from a pot, and carefully adds to the painting. The other

child is clearly not happy about the intervention, but the painting is neither hurriedly destroyed, nor does a teacher come to her rescue. I am not suggesting that we should invite children to impose themselves on other's work, only to reinforce the point that in Reggio Emilia, individual ownership is lower in the priority of values than the goal for representation to be a means to communication—a symbolic language for exchange of ideas between and among children and adults. Representation is more than the expressive act of an individual; it is instead, an invitation to interact.



**FIGURE 16.2.** The children encounter the stone lion and represent the experience with many languages.

**Constraint 2: In Our Desire to Help Children Get Along With Each Other, Do We See Conflict as Something Only to Be Avoided?**

In early childhood education as I have experienced it, there is a great desire for children to be able to "get along with each other." Helping children learn to cooperate, share, and take turns is viewed by parents, as well as teachers, as one of the most important goals and benefits of group settings. Indeed, I would agree with these goals and purposes. But one problem arises: Too much stress on niceness can lead to avoidance of any conflict. *Conflict* refers here not to abiding anger, antipathy, violence, and hatred, but rather the differing of perspectives the possibility of co-constructing a shared understanding.

Often, when teachers engage in problem solving and conflict resolution with children, they support the individuals in expressing their ideas and feelings ("I'm mad," "I wanted that"), but then do not proceed to help children really negotiate. This behavior, I suspect, reflects teachers'

concern that they will squash one child at the expense of another if they favor a negotiation process where, yes, some individual ideas will get lost or changed, to emerge as new ideas that reflect collaboration.

The work in Reggio Emilia asks us to view intellectual conflict as a social event—even an enjoyable process. Paola Strozzi, one of the Reggio teachers, commented that young children spend a great deal of time discussing how a game will proceed, with their interest not subsiding until they have decided: "I am convinced that there is some kind of pleasure in trying to agree about how to do things" (Teacher interview, June 14, 1990). The question that arises for the teacher is whether the children are allowed sufficient freedom and opportunity, to negotiate—even to argue—within the structure of the curriculum. Conflict within the envelope of a caring community is a source of growth.

To understand conflict as an opportunity for intellectual exchange and the building of community cohesion, teachers themselves must feel at home with such experiences. In Reggio Emilia, our research team sat in on some lengthy discussions involving all the teachers, custodial staff, the cook, and the *pedagogista and atelierista* of the Diana School (described in Edwards, Chapter 10, this vol). These were occasions for frank, often tense discussion about issues of genuine concern to everyone. The intent was not simply to share ideas but to resolve issues, learn something, and move to new levels of understanding. Tension and disequilibrium were not expected to be resolved internally, each person by himself or herself, but rather in and through interaction.

### **Constraint 3: Do We Limit Children's Emotions in Our Desire to Protect Children and Ourselves?**

Part of the uneasiness many teachers experience in relation to conflict has to do with the strong emotions—anger—it arouses; and the same may be true in the face of other emotions, too: sadness and even joy. Teachers (particularly those with an Anglo-American cultural orientation) seem to believe that the best reason for children to express strong emotions is as a therapeutic outlet, certainly not as an act of communication integral to learning. Yet, if we are seeking to support true community, we should remember that emotions are a binding force; they add depth and breadth to the humanity of a program. Our programs ought to include collective events creating shared, intense emotions—excitement, surprise, laughter, and even, at times, sadness and anger. Moments when something scary or unpleasant gives way to relief or triumph are times when community is built, because they are occasions that become part of the shared memory and vocabulary of the group.

In Reggio Emilia, the teachers talk about using "provocations" in their long term project work, to initiate a virtual outpouring of ideas, images, questions, and emotions. In the video tape, "The Portrait of a Lion" (see Additional Resources at the end of this volume), we see a number of provocations: teachers, dressed in a life-sized animal costume that symbolizes the Diana School arriving at lunch to greet the children; children taken on to a "meeting" with a familiar lion statue in the town square; and slide photos of this statue as well as wild lions projected in the classroom so the children can frolic and play with the color and line dancing on their bodies. Some American teachers viewing "The Portrait of the Lion" are taken aback by these provocations and

the intensity of the Reggio children's emotions. Yet as the project progresses, these shared emotions become a kind of fuel for the children's learning, and their energy is harnessed and focused as they make sense of their shared experiences-together.

#### **Constraint 4: Do We Honor Individual Differences by Keeping Them Invisible?**

A dilemma faced by many early childhood teachers concerns how to recognize children's individuality and uniqueness without at the same time fueling social comparison and competition. Teachers are concerned that children's fragile self-image and self-esteem may suffer if strengths and weaknesses are made too public, and so they focus children's attention away from differences toward the idea that "we are all the same."

There is, however, another way to view individual differences that support the building of a connected community, and that derives from the philosophy of John Dewey (Greenberg, 1992). We saw this philosophy in action both in Reggio Emilia and a school in Amherst, Massachusetts. Children are viewed as "resources" to each others' learning. An awareness of each others' profile of strengths, weaknesses, interests, and dislikes is important public knowledge for the community. Individual children are appreciated for being able to make different kinds of special contributions, as "experts" of different sorts. They are simultaneously allowed to benefit from and depend on the expertise of other. Thus, useful expertise is acknowledged within a wide definition of valuable skills, competencies, and resources, from being good at coloring with crayons, to being able to run fast:, to having older friends who can use the encyclopedia.

As an example, in one of the preschool classrooms that I studied for my dissertation research (Nimmo, 1992), there was a little girl recognized by everyone in her class as being the "class dinosaur," whenever acting out stories narrated by children (in Vivian Paley style):

Today, for instance, I had a bus that fell off the railroad tracks and turned into a dinosaur and that was the end of the story. Then the girl said, "But no, I can't do that because I want Simone to be a dinosaur too!" So, okay, it has be two dinosaurs, because she already knew that she was going to be one of the dinosaurs. So, she actually planned ahead. She knew Simone would volunteer because whenever there is a dinosaur in any story it's always Simone-she's our classroom dinosaur! (teacher interview in Nimmo, 1992, p. 162)

In Reggio Emilia the use of the many symbolic languages of young children and the avid pursuit of children's questions allows for a truly wide definition of valued resources. The use of multiple languages (e.g., gesture, movement, clay) gives children many entry points for offering and negotiating their ideas. Through the process of representation, children make their ideas (and misconceptions) explicit and the focus of communication.

In this volume, Carolyn Edwards (Chapter 10) tells the story of a small group of 5-year-olds in Reggio Emilia discussing with their teacher what information to include in an "instruction booklet" they are preparing for the new families coming to the school next fall. Two 5-year-olds disagree on what kind of school map would be best to include; and so, after much discussion and with the help of their, they decide to take two sample alternatives down to the 3-year-olds' classroom to get those children's advice on which map best serves the purpose of

communication. A clear preference is expressed by the 3-year olds as to the type of map they like best, and with the sensitive support of the teacher, the project proceeds.

Many educators would perceive a great risk in supporting this kind of feedback on children's work, for fear that a child's self-esteem could be at risk (in this case, the child whose map suggestion was not taken). Within the culture of Reggio Emilia, though, this kind of act does not come as a hurtful judgment, but rather as another opportunity to share perspectives in a long journey of clarifying ideas and establishing the kinds of resources that exist amongst peers. If one child is having trouble figuring out how to work with a wire tool, someone else can assist her. At the same time, she can offer her knowledge of snakes to the friend trying to make one with clay, or draw a human figure in order to help the class conceptualize this problem. These exchanges do not enhance competition (where one person's gain is another's loss), but are, instead, a quite *public* way of recognizing individual differences within the context of a group-approach, supportive of the sense of community that is being built.

In Reggio Emilia, Tiziana Filippini talked about the detailed intimate knowledge that children establish over the course of 3 years, where they remain with the same two teachers and virtually the same group of 25 peers:

It is in fact, with regard to everybody that they have a cognitive map that is very rich and elaborate, and as a consequence a strategy of behavior that is very individualized. (group interview, October, 1990).

This cognitive map facilitates collaborative learning because children are able adjust their strategies of communication for each of their peers.

Attempts to dissuade children from noticing each other's differences are not likely to be successful. Young children begin to engage actively in social comparison during the late preschool years (Chafel, 1987). They begin to notice differences between themselves and others and seek to understand what these differences mean. Toward the end of the preschool years, dominance hierarchies and "pecking orders" begin to emerge in children's unsupervised play all around the world (Whiting & Edwards, 1988). For the children, these behaviors have a deeper purpose than simply getting to know one another; they have to do with the development of self-identity. For example, Debbie LeeKeenan and I led a project at the University of Massachusetts with 2- and 3-year-olds, called "Looking at Each Other." This project grew out of the toddlers' emerging interest in each other and included a series of activities by which children could construct a clearer self-image, including body image (LeeKeenan & Nimmo, 1993).

When Loris Malaguzzi talked about the effect of group size on children's project work, he said that a group of two can be very desirable (Rankin, 1990) His concern was with enabling the exchange of ideas, *not* with separation. Malaguzzi said:

[P]erhaps a group of two would be a relationship to support strongly, because it means putting the child in front of the other; it means helping a child reach or gain a self-identity that is different from what he had before (Rankin, 1990, p. 1)

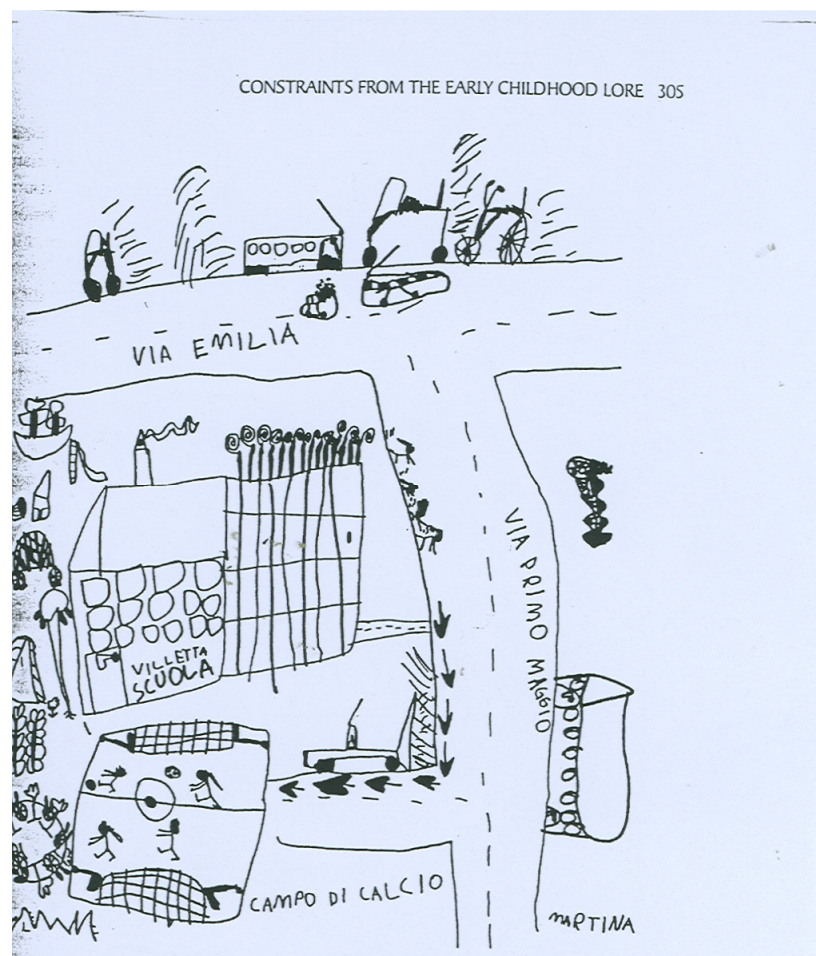
Malaguzzi believed that a child's self-identity is constructed out of relationships formed with people and things in the environment: without the group child could not find or develop any

identity. In contrast, in the United States and Australia, The Early Childhood Lore seems to be based on highlighting an celebrating the uniqueness of each child's identity as a means toward making child feel secure; this approach seems to suggest that identity is prior to life and is a characteristic of the child apart from others.

Laura Rubizzi, a teacher in Reggio Emilia, integrates a recognition of the individual with a more connected sense of identity in her discussion of children participation in group conversations:

Every group conversation is important. Yet I think that every child must understand and know his limits. The self must exist. I want for every child to be an individual. The children must know and appreciate each child for who he is an exchange, a give and take. (Teacher interview, November 11, 1989)

This more connected or social view of identity is also reflected in the Reggio educators' talk about favoring the *circulation* of ideas among children and adult in order to promote flexibility rather than rigidity in thinking: Ideas do no simply reside in the individual in isolation.



**FIGURE 16.3.** Children involve the community with an invitation/map for soccer match they are organizing in the school.

### **Constraint 5: Do We View the Young Child *as* living Only in Nests Composed of Family and Friends and Hidden From Public Life?**

Early education programs in the United States and in my home country of Australia are known for their focus on the family. Teachers recognize that their work with young children is dependent on a relationship of cooperation with children's lives in the home environment. Home visits, regular parent conferences, and opening the doors of preschool programs to parent and guardian participation have been notable features of quality programs in these countries.

Certainly, there is an urgent need to work toward a more reciprocal relationship with parents (see Chapter 8, this volume), and to recognize and respond to differences in each family's cultural goals. But it is the young child's "protection" from a much wider world of contacts that is particularly challenged by the work in Reggio Emilia.

Concerned with issues of separation and attachment, The Early Childhood Lore has limited the child's world to immediate peers, classroom, and family. In some ways, children are viewed as fragile and self centered, only aware of those people and places in the most immediate environments. Programs may have ventured into themes on "community helpers," such as firefighters and police officers, but have not taken children on more complex explorations of how they are part of and contribute to the surrounding neighborhood.

A more connected identity for young children raises the possibility that young children should be active participants in the wider arena of neighborhood and city contacts. In-depth projects in Reggio Emilia whether it is curiosity about the workings of pipes under the city roads or the annual grape harvest, are grounded in recognition of children's need to understand their relationship to the community. Children are invited to talk with city and farm workers about what they are doing. Field trips focus on incursions into the life of the surrounding streets and countryside rather than museums, zoos, and packaged entertainment. When a project is in process, teachers spread news of the children's work in the local newspaper. When it is time or celebration of a completed project, it is likely that the Mayor or other community members will be invited (see Rankin, Chapter 12, this volume).

For some cultural groups in the United States, it is hard to imagine separating children from community life as a way to protect them and there are existing programs that incorporate this view into curriculum design. For instance, the Alerta Approach (Williams & Gaetano, 1985) asks teachers to closely observe the local community so that resources can be identified and used in the program and material and curriculum can be developed in a truly responsive way. A step further, the antibias curriculum (Derman-Sparks & ABC Task Force, 1989) encourages teachers to support children to be "activities" in creating social change beyond the classroom in ways that are relevant to children's understanding of bias and fairness (Pelo, 1996)

Bringing children into the public sphere celebrates their potential to contribute and lets them feel the pulse of their future lives. Although "The Week of the Young Child" has been a time to make the public aware of the lives of children in group care in this country, I would

suggest that children's participation in and contribution to public life needs to be a part of their daily life.

### **Constraint 6: Do We View the Young Child as living Only in Present?**

Just as with the sense of children's lived space, the image that saturates The Early Childhood Lore is also bound by, defined by, a sense of time limited to the short present (see Phillips & Bredekamp, Chapter 23, this volume). Yet, commitment, attachment, and identification with a community are long-term process. John Dewey (1916), who has been a source of inspiration for progressive educators in both Italy and the United States, believed that over time, people engaged in repeated and varied experiences to learn more about each other, build common interests, and commit energy based on awareness of a shared future. Community stretches beyond a static life in the present to include a complex interaction of memories of the past, events in the present, and hopes for the future. The sociologist Robert Bellah and his colleagues (1985) wrote:

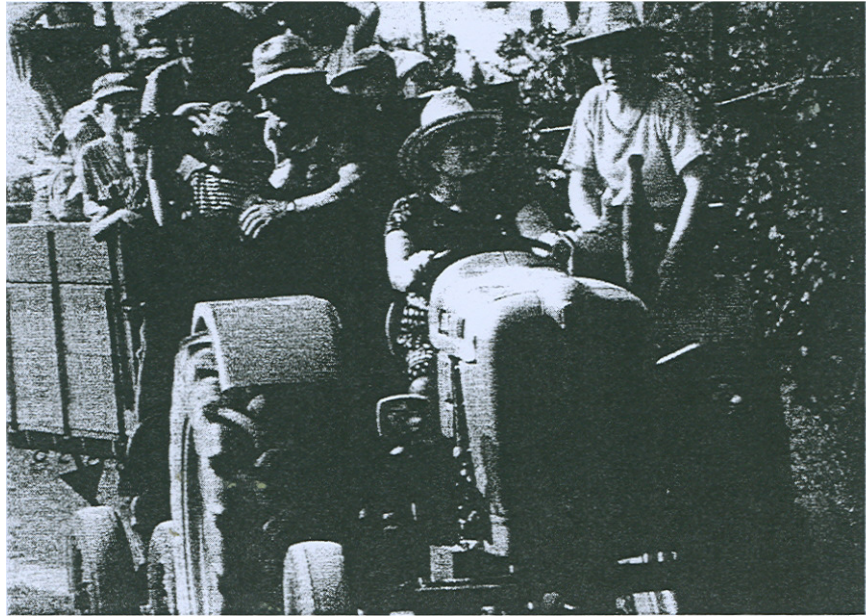
*Communities... have a history-in an important sense they are constituted by their by their past and for this reason we can speak of a real community as a "community of memory," one that does not forget that past, a community that is involved in retelling its story, its constitutive narrative. (p. 153)*

The image of the child in Reggio Emilia is one that places the child within the context of history-both personal, lived history, and the heritage of one's culture society. Malaguzzi (1992) made this point eloquently on one of his visits to the United States:

*We have to think in the plural-the children, the people. Each of us contains many people. I contain many people, you contain many. Children are big bowls is of mine-strones [vegetable soup]-they contain lots of pieces of history and are a continuous reconstruction of that history. (p. 10)*

Educators in Reggio Emilia talk frequently about the importance of "continuity" in children's lives, and use many practices that support this notion. For one thing, children spend 3 years in the company of the same teacher and the same group of children. For another, documentation provides a concrete memory of adults' and children's lives together (see Rinaldi, Chapter 5, and Forman & Fyfe, Chapter 13, this volume). The walls of the classrooms and school are literally -drenched with the signs of past and ongoing activity; each panel offers an opportunity to retell a story. Unlike end products (which Vea Vecchi, 1994, referred to as only the "witness" to an event), documentation panels allow for a reenactment. For a final example, ritual and celebration are used to mark the passage of time in a way accessible to children. For instance, a zebra has become the special symbol of Diana School. Many years ago, it was painted on the wall of the dining room, partly because of its design elements and potential to provoke projects. From time to time, teachers do such things as cover the Zebra, in order that it can emerge as a three-dimensional creature (a life-sized puppet acted out by teachers), for special occasions. Children greeting this Zebra with a joyous response can be seen in the videotape, "To Me a Portrait of a Lion," and in "The Summer Fresco" portion of The Hundred Languages of Children Exhibit. Over the years, the older children (the veterans) have informed the younger children (the novices) of the many adventure of the Zebra and the likelihood of more to come.

All of these practices help to ensure that the past is community—a source of identity and inspiration, rather than a restriction on change and innovation.



**FIGURE 16.4.** Children with farmers during the harvesting of grapes. Children worked along with them and asked them many questions. (From the exhibit, *The hundred languages of children*)

#### CHANGE: WHERE TO BEGIN?

In this chapter I have presented some of the ways in which the approach Reggio Emilia might challenge early childhood educator to reexamine the mainstream assumptions about the potential of young children to participate in and contribute to a rich community life. And yet, in Reggio Emilia a system of education has developed over time that tells its *own* unique stories about people and places. How could this approach offer useful ideas or answers to what is happening in our American classrooms? Teachers must co-construct the answer with the children and families of their classrooms because together they are the keeper of the history, geography, and culture of their communities (Jones & Nimmo, 1994). Any possible adaptation of intriguing or inspiring idea from Reggio Emilia must begin with a close look at their own situation; each preschool, kindergarten, and day care center is "not just anywhere" but "a very particular place" (Gandini, 1984, p. 20).

My own encounter with the experience of Reggio Emilia has provoked me to consider what I am doing and brought down a deluge of questions, rather, answers, to stretch my thinking about how I work with both young and adult learners. These are the questions I have come to believe most important to consider.

1. What is your image of the young child?
2. How do you define and balance individual and collective "ownership" of idea and products in the classroom?

3. How do you view the role of conflict and strong emotions in your classroom?
4. How do you celebrate the child's identity within the context, of a group?
5. How do you connect the child to the ever widening circles of a public life?
6. How can your child's sense of self reach beyond the present to include both the past and future?

In answering these questions we must begin with ourselves and the community of learners of which we are a part. This is not always easy, for instance, I myself do not feel that I really know how best to contribute to community, collaborate genuinely with colleagues, and move through conflicts with a certainty that we will all arrive at a place of better understanding. These understandings are not in my bones, because they have been missing from my cultural experience and education. Yet, in building communities with young children, we educationalists must begin by trying our best to model collaboration in the community at an adult level.

Many will need to develop new skills and dispositions as they place themselves in unfamiliar cultural territory. As an Australian with an Anglo-European heritage, I also need to remind myself that the individualistic lens that has so influenced The Early Childhood Lore is not the worldview assumed by everyone in this profession or country. Many cultural groups different from my own have always placed greater emphasis on the binding and affirming values of family and community interdependency, [For instance, just as the Italian educators refer to the phrase *Io chi siamo*, in African-American cultural heritage, there exists a parallel concept of interdependence and mutual aid referred to as "I am because we are" (Warfield-Coppock, 1994).] Although the early childhood profession has always shared a strong commitment to the rights of children and families, we still need to learn better ways to listen close to all voices and learn from their collective wisdom.

The educators of Reggio Emilia, too, are eager to learn. In particular, Loris Malaguzzi talked often of his desire to learn from North American teachers about the complexities of multiculturalism as Italian society becomes more ethnically diverse. I believe that teacher Paola Strozzi reflected this sense of openness in the following words about entering investigations with children:

The point is that we are entering a world of views, and it is very important for us to say that there is not only one truth, because the truth can always be falsified. It is important to be able to explore a world full of surprises. Also with a sense of wonder and pleasure. (Interview, June 14, 1990)

For me, it is a sad comment on the long journey ahead for this country in truly embracing multiculturalism, that it was international experience of a European program that provoked widespread recognition of multiple views of childhood, when all the time, here at home, many diverse communities and programs struggled to be heard and supported in the mainstream.

The exchange of perspectives enables us to discover a more complex truth about the potential of children; it allows us to go beyond the false dichotomies, the either-or's, that we so often set up between care and education, similarity and difference, individual and group, past and present, product and process. If we can begin to complicate and transcend these false dichotomies, we will surely be better able to play our role in realizing the potential of all children.